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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ROME 000312

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OSD-P FOR MADELINE LEPAGE; USNATO FOR COL SANDY GUPTILL

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SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN: ITALY STRESSES LONG-TERM COMMITMENT  
AT WEST 4 MEETINGS

REF: STATE 19466

Classified By: Acting Political Minister-Counselor Jonathan Cohen for R  
easons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (SBU) Summary: Italy hosted a "West 4" meeting of ISAF RC-West contributor nations (Italy, Lithuania, Spain and the U.S.) in Rome on March 4. Italian MFA U/S for Asia Gianni Vernetti, in his opening address, said that Italy is in Afghanistan for the "long haul" in both its civilian and military capacity. Other participant nations made similar statements of commitment and demonstrated broad agreement as to the priorities and challenges facing their contingents in RC-West. Participants agreed on the importance of the "comprehensive approach" to security and reconstruction, the continued "Afghanization" of the security mission through the training of Afghan security forces, capacity building and governance support on the provincial and district level, and isolating violent extremists from local populations. The U.S. delegation stressed the need to fill the shortfall in OMLTs and police mentors, to ensure that embedded trainers play an active part in Afghan Army and Police operations, and to increase donor contributions in support of upcoming elections. End summary.

Meeting of RC-West Nations Reveals Unity of Views on  
Afghanistan

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12. (SBU) The so-called "West 4" Political-Military Consultations, an Italian initiative, is a series of meetings between the PRT contributor nations to ISAF Regional Command-West, which Italy commands. The first meeting was held in Kabul in February. Subsequent meetings are planned for Kabul and Herat with future meetings with representation from capitals only on an as-needed basis. (Note: MFA Officials, when briefed on U.S. concerns that the West 4 proposals not duplicate or undermine existing NATO-ISAF mechanisms (Ref A), stressed that this was not their intent and that future consultations after the Rome meeting would remain informal and Kabul/Herat-based). Also in attendance were delegations from Albania and Slovenia, both of which have troops in RC-West. The Italian MFA is in the process of circulating a draft informal statement of conclusions which will be forwarded to the Department once completed.

13. (SBU) Italian MFA U/S for Asia Gianni Verneti, in his opening address, said that Italy is in Afghanistan for the "long haul," in both its civilian and military capacity. He underscored the "broad political consensus" in Italy in favor of the mission (as demonstrated by the fact that 85 per cent of Parliament voted for the decree refinancing military missions abroad on February 26), and asserted that this consensus would remain intact regardless of the outcome of the April 13-14 Italian General Elections. He also stressed that the RC-West consultations were not meant to set up a competing mechanism to existing fora in Brussels and Kabul, but rather to ensure better international and interagency coordination in the field by strengthening interagency coordination in and among capitals. Among Italy's main priorities, Verneti listed the strengthening of the Police and Armed Forces, support for local government and justice sector capacity-building programs at the provincial and district level, and isolating extremists from the local population. He stressed that success in RC-West will depend upon the effective implementation of the "comprehensive approach," integrating civilian and military efforts in all aspects of the mission.

Fragile Security Situation in All Four Provinces  
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14. (C) Italian PolDir Giulio Terzi, Spanish PolDir Dezcallar, Lithuanian MoD U/S for Defense Policy Norkus and U.S. Department of State Afghanistan Office Director Tim Wilder described security challenges in their respective provinces (Herat, Baghdis, Ghor and Farah): which include friction between local leaders and tribal groups, infiltration of

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Taliban from RC-South, ties between insurgents and drug traffickers, ineffective local government and insufficient Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) presence. The Spanish and Lithuanian delegations noted that the weak presence of UNAMA in their provinces hampers PRT reconstruction efforts, as does the lack of a permanent ANA presence. Italian and U.S. representatives stressed that any proposals to increase ANA levels must be coordinated with the ANA National Strategy that was approved in the Afghanistan Compact. Both Tim Wilder and Madeline LePage from OSD-Policy underscored the need to close the gap between security operations and reconstruction, citing the Commanders Emergency Response Program (CERP) as a potential model. They described the Focused District Development Program for police training and mentoring and encouraged RC-West partners to deploy OMLTs alongside their units during operations.

15. (C) Italian Defense General Staff Operations and Plans Chief Major General Preziosa highlighted the need for additional OMLTs in the Farah-based Second Brigade of the 207th ANA Corps as well as for increased police training for the ANP and Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) (Note: these are both areas where Italian officials have suggested they may be able to do more). Italy is considering sending Mobile Artillery and Engineer Training Teams to Herat as well, under the CSTC-A framework. The Spanish delegation said that Spain will provide a Forward Support Base at a former Soviet base in Qal-e-Naw to train an ANA kandak (battalion) and will sponsor the training and equipping of one ANA unit. Spain also noted plans to set up "PRT satellite centers" in the north if the ANA provides force protection.

16. (C) Dezcallar said that in Spain's view Iran has been a "stabilizing influence" in Baghdis, building schools and infrastructure. Considering that Iran has a problem with opiate trafficking from Afghanistan, ISAF should consider engaging Iran to optimize its positive influence and minimize its negative tendencies. Wilder stressed that Iranian involvement was a complex issue that might not be appropriate for this forum, and that Iran's contribution was mixed at

best, due to its expulsion of Afghan refugees, the appearance of Iranian-supplied weapons in insurgent-held areas, and trade practices that were undercutting local producers.

¶7. (C) All delegations stressed the importance of getting the EUPOL mission off the ground. Lithuania had withdrawn its police trainers from Ghor in the expectation that they would be replaced by EUPOL, but that has not happened. Italy, which has 16 Carabinieri and Financial Police officers assigned to EUPOL, noted that the EUPOL mission at the PRT in Herat is focused exclusively on mentoring, not training. Italy also has 14 Financial Police training Afghan Border Police in Herat outside of the EUPOL framework. Italy, Spain and Lithuania all stressed the importance of disaster preparedness training for local governments in the wake of the winter 2007-2008 snowfall emergencies.

Support to Provincial Governance/Justice Sector: Importance of the IDLG

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¶8. (SBU) Italian MFA Special Envoy for Afghanistan Sergio Mercuri said that Italy's aid focus is shifting towards building local government capacity and invited other RC-West members to consider pooling their funding in support of the Afghan Government's Independent Directorate for Local Government (IDLG). Italian MFA Justice Reform Coordinator Rosario Aitala stressed that local governance and justice reform were "two sides of the same coin," and that if local governments fail to provide services the population will turn to the Taliban. The GoA had committed to formulating a National Justice Plan at the Rome Rule of Law Conference in July 2007; the resulting plan, unveiled at the Tokyo JCMB meeting last February, was robust and realistic. He encouraged all RC-West members to contribute to it via the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF). Italy has funded a train-the-trainers program for Afghan judges in 12 provinces

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including Herat, and is looking into working with the Focused District Development program to provide judicial training in Farah.

Comment  
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¶9. (C) From the Italian perspective, the RC-West meeting was a success. The GOI not only demonstrated and declared its long-term commitment to Afghanistan, but was able to display an in-depth knowledge of local realities and challenges that is not always apparent in the public pronouncements of Italian officials. Despite the high-level representation on the part of the Italian, Spanish and Lithuanian delegations, their presentations were substantive rather than generic. Contrary to public statements that have been made in the past by senior-level Italian politicians, the participants never suggested that there was any NATO responsibility for civilian casualties or insufficient OEF-ISAF coordination. From the U.S. perspective, the results were encouraging because all participants agreed on the fundamental importance of the comprehensive approach, ANA and ANP training and mentoring, the need to partner with provincial and district officials to enhance local governance, and the core principles of counterinsurgency, including the need to separate insurgents from the population.

¶10. (U) SCA/A Director Tim Wilder has cleared this message.

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